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ABSTRACT

A discussion of language acquisition assumes that lexicon plays a central role, and that the principles of conventionality and contrast are also essential. It examines the hypotheses children draw on about possible word meanings and how they map their meanings into forms. This process begins with children's emerging knowledge of conventional words and their meanings, then proceeds to their growing knowledge of word structure as reflected in their formation of new words, showing that children learning different languages follow similar patterns as they learn about words and word structure. The book emphasizes the principles children rely on as they analyze complex word forms: transparency of meaning; simplicity of form; and productivity. Examples are drawn from children's innovations, in a variety of languages, in these functional areas: words for things, words for agents and instruments, words for actions, and words for undoing actions. (MSE)

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